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E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR
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SUBJ: IRAQ-IRAN WAR: ESCALATION OF THE WAR: NEED TO
PRESSURE IRAQ TO DE-ESCALATE

1. (SECRET-ENTIRE TEXT)

2. NOW THAT THE WAR OF THE CITIES HAS RESUMED (REGARDLESS OF WHO ACTUALLY STARTED IT), THE IRAQIS APPEAR TO FEEL THAT FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE 1980-81 THEY HAVE A SIGNIFICANT STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE OVER IRAN. ALTHOUGH UNDERSECRETARY HAMDOON ARGUED TO ME YESTERDAY THAT IRAQ WANTS TO ASSURE MUTUAL DETERRENCE AGAINST HITTING THE TWO CAPITALS, THE IRAQIS ARE SHOWING NONE OF THE MEASURED RESPONSE SUCH A GOAL WOULD IMPLY. RATHER THEY HAVE FIRED NINETEEN MISSILES TO DATE, NAMED BY THEM PROVOCATIVELY THE "HUSSEIN" AFTER SHIA ISLAM'S MOST HOLY FIGURE, AND, EVEN MORE PROVOCATIVELY, HAVE FIRED THE LATEST ONE AGAINST THE HOLY CITY OF QUM.

3. WE BELIEVE THAT THE IRAQIS SEE THIS STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE AND ARE PRESSING IT HOME. IF THEY HAVE STOCKPILED A LARGE SUPPLY OF MISSILES (WE ASSUME BUT DO NOT KNOW THAT THEY ARE SOVIET SS-12'S), THEY HAVE BADLY OUTGUNNED THE IRANIANS WHO HAVE ONLY A LIMITED SUPPLY OF OBSOLETE, SLOW-RELOADING SCUD B'S WITH A FEW LAUNCHERS. THE IRAQIS ALSO KNOW THAT THEY HAVE AN ADVANTAGE ON THE GROUND. IRAN IS NOT READY FOR AN ALL-OUT OFFENSIVE IN THE SOUTH. IF IT IS GOADED TO ATTACK WITH WHAT THEY HAVE, THEY FACE ALMOST CERTAIN DEFEAT AND THE POSSIBILITY OF A STRONG COUNTER-ATTACK FROM IRAQ. THE WINDOW FOR ATTACKING IS RAPIDLY RUNNING OUT FOR IRAN, SINCE THE PRIME WINTER IAPYJV S PQMF AILL BE OVER BY THE END OF THIS MONTH, HARDLY ENOUGH TIME EVEN IF A NEW RECRUITING OF BASIJ STIMULATED BY THE MISSILE ATTACKS BEGINS IMMEDIATELY.

4. THE IRAQ MOTIVE IN FORCING AN ESCALATION OF THE FIGHTING IS CLEARLY TO MAKE IRAN GIVE UP ITS WAR AIMS. FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE THE INITIAL AIR RAIDS ON KHARG ISLAND THREE YEARS AGO, IRAQ SENSES THAT IT REALLY HAS THE ABILITY TO FORCE AN END TO HOSTILITIES, RATHER THAN JUST TO REACT. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, IT IS NOT LIKELY TO LISTEN TO APPEALS TO EASE OFF.

5. OUR CONDEMNATION OF BOTH SIDES FOR ATTACKING CIVILIAN TARGETS WAS JUST RIGHT. I BELIEVE THAT, IF THE ATTACKS GO ON ANOTHER DAY, WE SHOULD GO BEYOND THE CONDEMNATION AND PRASS IRWY TT BE-ESCALATE. I AM NOT SANGUINE THAT THEY WILL LISTEN, SINCE THEY SEE A VITAL OPPORTUNITY AND THEIR RECORD FOR LISTENING TO OUR UNWELCOME ADVICE IS NOT ENCOURAGING. BUT IN THE INTEREST OF OUR EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE A QUICK PEACEFUL END TO THIS CONFLICT AND ABOVE ALL TO AVOID THE DANGERS OF AN INTENSIFIED WAR, I BELIEVE WE SHOULD MAKE THE EFFORT.

NEWTON